Gender, affectivity and sexuality in primary education: case study of a Chilean program

Valeria Breull-Arancibia
Universidad Diego Portales. Chile.
valeriabreull@gmail.com

Ingrid Agud-Morell
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Spain.
ingrid.agud@uab.cat

Abstract

Contributing to the many initiatives around the globe that foster gender education in primary school, we present the pioneering case of Paillaco (Chile). An educational program on "gender, affectivity and sexuality", implemented since 2014, which has been influential in challenging gender injustice in education in the region and offers a potential template for others to follow. This case study, framed as Feminist Activist Research, aims to identify: the theoretical and pedagogical discourses that shape the program; the subjectivities of the schoolteachers appointed as "gender monitors"; and the effects and challenges perceived in and by the community. Results show that the program draws on critical-feminist pedagogies, queer theory and appeals for the provision of a comprehensive sexuality education. Training the teachers emerges as the key for raising gender awareness. Finally, positive changes such as reduction of gender violence are perceived because of the implementation of the program.

Keywords: sexuality education; critical feminist pedagogy; primary education; teachers' subjectivity

Resum. *Gènere, afectivitat i sexualitat a l'educació primària: estudi de cas sobre un programa xilè*

Contribuint a moltes iniciatives arreu del món que fomenten l'educació de gènere a l'escola primària, presentem el cas pioner de Paillaco (Xile). Un programa educatiu sobre «gènere, afectivitat i sexualitat», implementat des de 2014, que destaca perquè afronta la injustícia de gènere a l'educació a la regió i ofereix un model potencial perquè d'altres el puguin replicar. Aquest estudi de cas, emmarcat en la investigació activista feminista, té com a objectiu identificar els discursos teòrics i pedagògics que donen forma al programa, les subjectivitats de les docents designades com a «monitores de gènere» i els efectes i desafiaments percebuts en i per la comunitat. Els resultats mostren que el programa es nodreix de pedagogies critico-feministes, teoria *queer* i crides a utilitzar una educació integral en sexualitat. La formació de les docents sorgeix com a clau per augmentar la consciència de gènere. Finalment, es perceben canvis positius com a resultat de la implementació del programa, com ara la reducció de la violència de gènere.

Paraules clau: educació afectivo-sexual; pedagogia crítica feminista; educació primària; subjectivitat docent

Resumen. *Género, afectividad y sexualidad en educación primaria: estudio de caso sobre un programa chileno*

Contribuyendo a las muchas iniciativas alrededor del mundo que fomentan la educación de género en la escuela primaria, presentamos el caso pionero de Paillaco (Chile). Un programa educativo sobre «género, afectividad y sexualidad», implementado desde 2014, que ha sido influyente porque afronta la injusticia de género en la educación en la región y ofrece un modelo potencial para que otros lo puedan replicar. Este estudio de caso, enmarcado en la investigación activista feminista, tiene como objetivo identificar los discursos teóricos y pedagógicos que dan forma al programa, las subjetividades de las docentes designadas como «monitoras de género» y los efectos y desafíos percibidos en y por la comunidad. Los resultados muestran que el programa se nutre de pedagogías crítico-feministas, teoría *queer* y llamamientos al uso de una educación integral en sexualidad. La formación de las docentes surge como la clave para aumentar la conciencia de género. Finalmente, se perciben cambios positivos como resultado de la implementación del programa, como la reducción de la violencia de género.

Palabras clave: educación afectivo-sexual; pedagogía crítica feminista; educación primaria; subjetividad docente

Summary

1. Introduction

Educational initiatives seeking to change primary education as a proliferator of gender injustice and heteronormativity have been implemented and studied around the globe (see LGBT Inclusive Education in Scotland[1] or the *Coeduca't* program in Catalonia[2]). This paper focuses on a Chilean case study that offers a view on the effectivity and transformative power of gender educational programs, even when these are introduced in challenging communities. The purpose of the study is two-fold. First, to identify the approach that frames the program and the teachers' backgrounds; and second, to assess whether the program has effectively transformed the community, and how this has been achieved.

The study leads to the conclusion that the gender educational program implemented indeed had a profound potential to meaningfully transform the community in terms of challenging school cultures and traditions and changing student, teacher and family behaviours and attitudes towards gender and sexuality issues. The program was effective despite the fact that, on the one hand, some theories framing the program presented some limitations (e.g.

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1.   <https://lgbteducation.scot/about/>.
2.   <https://projectes.xtec.cat/educacioinclusiva/general/coeducat/>.

binarism, missing a discourse of desire in sexuality education units (Fine, 1988) or low inclusion of diverse sexualities and identities); and, on the other, that teachers had not been extensively trained. The study captures a potential key element that leads to effective transformations in the community, namely how the program allows the different layers of the community to participate and become involved in the program.

We aim to build on previous case studies with similar goals. On the one hand, this research echoes the work developed by Ollis (2017), from which we learned the challenges facing teachers translating feminist theory into practice, and the materials that are effective in changing student behaviours. The main argument of Ollis's work is that apparent theoretical robustness and practical effect seem to be in a strange inverse relationship. Our results confirm this thesis, adding that both the robustness of theories and the degree of teachers' "gender blindness" (in terms of received training and subjectivities, see Agud et al., 2020) appear to be non-central elements for achieving community transformations. However, what emerged as key for real transformation were participatory methodologies and the involvement of the community as part of the educational initiative. As Ollis (2017) argues, working with community agencies is perhaps the "most challenging and rewarding aspect of translating research into practice, particularly in school-based sexuality and relationships education" (pp. 61-62).

On the other hand, we also follow the work of Atkinson (2020) in comparing two primary schools, one of which was involved in a project that challenges heteronormativity in education. She focuses on the effects that the program *No Outsiders* had on children's attitudes towards sexuality, stating that "proactive sexualities pedagogy [is] essential to countering the damaging effects of institutional invisibility" (p. 15). As we will explain below, this is also shown in the present study when analysing the transformations made by the program.

We hope that what we examine here can add some insights into the educational transformative power of gender-affectivity-sexuality-based programs in primary school, not only at an individual but also at a community level. We would like to demonstrate the power of primary schools to transform their immediate context when they invite the community to engage with them, and how transcendental and healing the introduction of gender-based educational programs can be for a damaged community, despite the supposed simplicity of the theories that frame the approach, the weakness of teacher training, or how challenging the context can be.

The analysis of the different aspects of the program is based on a feminist critical pedagogy framework. First, to examine discourses, we drew on Ollis (2017), as well as on Jones' (2011) sexuality education discourses framework. Also, we considered contributions from various authors (see Morgade, 2019; Zemaitis, 2019; Lawrence & Taylor, 2019; Machlus, 2019; Burns et al., 2019; Rosales-Mendoza & Salinas-Quiroz, 2017), which emphasize the importance of including desire, body sovereignty, identity self-ascription, consent, care and affective responsibility in relationships, as well as the end of

binary thinking and the visibility of the diversity of sex-gender identities and of the LGBTIQ+ population.

Regarding subjectivities, we formulated our results dialogue with the notion of "gender blindness" (Rifà, 2018) and of gender consciousness and cosmovision (Colás & Jiménez, 2006): non-consciousness, consciousness of resistance and critical consciousness. We also apply Carrillo's (2017) assertion on political-ethical orientations of pedagogical relations. Carrillo determines that a political-ethical orientation towards learning needs to be employed in any educational practice, since none of them is neutral. In Carrillo's view, this orientation includes feelings, ideas and actions.

One cannot fail to consider critical feminist pedagogy as a relevant way of putting gender and sexuality education into practice. According to hooks (2017), education must generate critical awareness of gender inequalities, making visible the subordinations and colonisations produced by patriarchy, and enacting ethics of mutual care. The author affirms that it is essential to educate from a feminist perspective during childhood, since this is the moment when identities and social roles are built.

2. Method

This is a single case study analysis, as we aimed to investigate the particularities of the pioneer experience of the implementation of the program of gender, affectivity and sexuality in Paillaco. The study is framed by the feminist activist research (FAS) approach proposed by Biglia (2007), and by Gerlach's (2018) idea of research justice, which states that every research study should involve the community through mutual respect and transparent and equitable relationships. The present study has therefore been co-constructed from its initial stages in collaboration with the program coordinator, taking into account the interests and needs of the schools and the main interest of the researchers to generate knowledge that benefits the community, with a strong commitment for social change, both central aspects of Biglia's FAS and Gerlach' relational approach. In this section, first we introduce the case study, followed by the participants and strategies, and finally the data analysis.

2.1. The case: program of gender, affectivity and sexuality

Paillaco is a city in Valdivia province, southern Chile, with a population of 20,000. The region has the highest numbers in Chile for violence against women, with 21.8% in 2013 (Adimark, 2013, quoted in Flores, 2016). Therefore, to prevent gender violence from persisting, an educational program in primary schools was undertaken as a strategy to enact change. A gender expert was hired by the city hall to coordinate and design the program of gender, affectivity and sexuality (hereafter PGAS). The PGAS coordinator managed implementation of the program in the twelve schools in the city: eleven primary schools and one secondary school.

Each school selected one teacher to be trained and to be responsible for leading and implementing the program in their respective schools. These teachers were given the role of "school monitor for gender" (SMG), and were responsible for creating a personalized "plan for gender, affectivity and sexuality", to fit the needs of their school.

The following actions were taken to implement the PGAS, as explained by the program coordinator:

(1) The city council coordinator developed a systematic training plan on gender and sexuality for the twelve SMGs. The SMGs and the coordinator met once per month for training, and to organize community work, and to share and learn from the different experiences. In addition, they had a "phone messaging group" where they had the option of continued communication when required.

(2) SMGs developed training workshops with the families of each school. The meetings with families were called *mateadas,* as they created a friendly and trustful environment while having a cup of mate tea (a tradition in the area) to approach sensitive topics such as violence and sexuality.

(3) School curricular adjustments at all educational levels were made to incorporate the topic of gender, affectivity and sexuality. Also, after-school activities related to the topic were implemented.

(4) Gender perspective was implemented in different subjects with an interdisciplinary approach and involving the whole community. Community members such as midwifes, psychologists, social workers and children's rights stake holders, among others, were involved. A network was established with the local university and organizations such as Amnesty International and Casa de la Mujer de Paillaco [House for Women of Paillaco].

(5) Publicising the PGAS was key for success: the coordinator established a radio podcast to promote the program, in which sexologists, union leaders, professionals and members of the community were invited to speak on gender issues. This brought a lot of attention and created a strong community involvement with the PGAS.

(6) An intersectional feminist perspective was taken, since dimensions of gender, ethnicity and class were especially relevant in the community. As the coordinator stated, "a main goal is to articulate the gender perspective and bring back the recognition of indigenous people and women's contributions in the history of this city".

2.2. Study participants and data collection

Of the twelve schools in the municipality that are implementing the PGAS, six were part of this study. In each school, the SMG participated in the research, which makes a total of six SMGs, with experience ranging between two and five years in their role. The municipal coordinator of the program participated and contributed with a more historical and global vision. Thus,

seven people participated in total, all women between 28 and 38 years old and who do not happen to belong to the Mapuche ethnic group.

Data collection was carried out over three months. The main strategies were, first, documentary analysis of the contents and materials of the PGAS, specifically the SMG training modules; the schools' teacher training modules; and the curriculum designs for implementation in the classroom (see Table 1). Next, we performed semi-structured interviews with the seven research participants mentioned above (see Table 2). Participants gave their consent, and instructions from the institutional Ethics Committee were followed.

Finally, a focus group was organized, which brought together the seven participants and other educational agents in Paillaco to share and validate the results of the study. In this way, we received feedback to enrich the results, following Gerlach's (2018) proposal on the participatory nature of research, reciprocity and the need for the results to be useful for the community, and Haraway's (1988) idea of shared conversations.

Triangulation of sources and strategies allowed us to relate the information and give a coherent response to the specific objectives.

2.3. Data analysis

The study questions – content analysis of theoretical and pedagogical approaches, the teacher's subjectivities, and the program effects on the community – were undertaken using the *Gender Perspective on Education. Conceptual Framework* developed by the Group of Education and Gender of the Autonomous University of Barcelona (Agud et al., 2020), an expert-validated tool to evaluate or critically reflect on the gender perspective in educational programs.

Coding and content analysis were carried out by the researchers, and the resulting topics were discussed and validated with the research community (Gerlach, 2018). Below are the tables of codes and data resources of the results.

Table 1. Key documents analysed and corresponding codes

Key documents analysed	Codes
1st SMG Training Module 2020	MFM1
2nd SMG Training Module 2019	MFM2
1st School Teacher Training Module: Stereotypes and Gender	MFD1
2nd School Teacher Training Module: Sexual and Reproductive Rights	MFD2
3rd School Teacher Training Module: Spermarche, Menarche and Intimate Hygiene	MFD3
Curriculum Designs	DC

Source: prepared by authors.

Table 2. Interviewees and corresponding identification codes

Interviewed	Codes
(1) SMG with 1 year in post Placed at a school: • Primary Education • Rural • Presence of Mapuche students	EM1
(2) SMG with 2.5 years in post Placed at a school: • Primary Education • Rural • Presence of Mapuche students	EM2
(3) SMG with 2 years in post Placed at a school: • Primary Education • Rural • Presence of Mapuche students	EM3
(4) SMG with 2 years in post Placed at a school: • Primary Education • Urban • Without presence of Mapuche students	EM4
(5) SMG with 4 years in post Placed at a school: • Secondary Education • Urban • Without presence of Mapuche students	EM5
(6) SMG with 1 year in post Placed at a school: • Primary Education • Rural • Presence of Mapuche students	EM6
(7) Municipal Coordinator with 6 years in post Works at the City Council Department of Educations; designs and coordinates PGAS	EC

Source: prepared by authors.

3. Results

3.1. Discourses: Approach to gender-based education program in primary school

Regarding the theoretical and pedagogical discourses that frame the program, we observed that the program's approach is coherent with critical gender theories and critical-feminist pedagogies which emphasize the relationship between knowledge and power (Liljeström, 2021; hooks, 1994). We identified in the documents analysed a change in the approach of the program that transitions from a vision that sustains the division of sex (biology)/gender (culture) (DC; MFM2) to one that questions the binarism (man/women; male/female): "the binomial sex/gender distinguishes nature from culture, intensifying the idea of the biological as something static and immutable"

(MFM1, p. 13). However, just one of the six SMG teachers interviewed had this post-binary approach.

On the other hand, most of the documents analysed, as well as the coordinator interview, refer to the problem of gender violence, including both women and sexual dissent, and problematizing gender stereotypes, sexism, romantic love, patriarchy, heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity (MFD1; MFM1; MFM2; EC). The contents analysed promote awareness of gender violence, and the damaging practices of sexting and grooming (DC; MFD2; MFM1). In addition, they problematize mainstream pornography, stating that "it expresses sexist behaviours, and it has negative impact on sexual roles" (MFD2, p. 8). In turn, the coordinator affirms that "it is very powerful, we do not know still how many aggressions we can avoid with this educational experience" (EC). Finally, it is mentioned that medical, psychological and social support must be given to transgender students. The coordinator stated in the interview that the approach has been transformed from a focus on women to a broader one: "In 2017 the paradigm changed because a comprehensive sex education began to be included, the issue of sexual diversity or sexual dissents, the issue of trans students and so on" (EC). Nevertheless, the training module for the teachers refers briefly to the flexibility and instability of gender identity, sexuality and expression (MFM1). It emerges that there is a lack of contents that include diversity of sex-gender identities/existences and specific recognition and visibility of the LGBTIQ+ collective.

One of the documents analysed alludes to human rights to understand sexual and reproductive rights from a perspective of freedom, equity and autonomy (MFD2). Furthermore, the coordinator sustains that teaching from this perspective is a fundamental right for students that schools must guarantee (EC). Thus, the program shows a purposeful use of theories of gender and equity pedagogies with a human rights focus. We identified in the interviews a strong political-ethical orientation from SMGs, which aims to educate, to excite, to question and to transform society (Carrillo, 2017), and to promote active participation and reflection, incorporating the knowledge and experiences of the students.

As for the approach of the program on sexuality education, the curricula design and the training module for SMG teachers closely addresses a "hygienist-pathologist" and "functionalist-biological" focus (UNESCO, 2014). It teaches knowledge and care of the body, puberty changes, reproduction, birth and intimate hygiene (DC; MFD2). The documents analysed give explanations on STDs, contraceptive methods and family diversity (DC; MFD2), at the same time as raising topics on sexual reproductive rights to guarantee free and responsible decision-making, privacy and self-body empowerment (MFD2; DC). Contents mainly emphasized the importance of the will, with training on consent, care and affective responsibility (DC, p. 22-24).

The approach to pleasure, desire and agency is briefly covered in the training program; the contents aim at educating on sexuality from the point of

view of love, affectivity and pleasure, and to develop the personal skills necessary to exercise sexual and reproductive rights that allow the establishment of healthy, consensual and safe relationships.

Finally, the program maintains an intersectional approach by crossing the sex-gender system with dimensions such as child-youth protagonism, ethnicity and geography. A critical view is observed towards ethnocentrism, adultcentrism and universalism. The contents of the program show recognition of the contribution to knowledge of cultures and ethnic groups historically made invisible, and articulation with the local culture.

3.2. Subjectivities: Teachers' gender awareness

Regarding gender awareness (Colás & Jiménez, 2006), the SGMs mainly mentioned the social differences between men and women and the injustice it entails, as expressed in the following quote: "Men have everything so easy in life, but women have always been fighting against it" (EM6). In addition, they refer to phenomena such as the lack of sexual and reproductive rights and the economic dependence of women, the hierarchies in certain institutions such as the armed forces and public order, violence, sexual harassment, rape and femicides. Regarding the school context, they indicate that teachers tend to maintain gender stereotypes and the use of sexist language, and in some establishments the role of women is minimized (EM4), and there have been cases of sexual harassment and rape (EM5). However, only when specifically questioned did the interviewees allude to discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, suggesting that gay and transgender people live realities of exclusion and inequality. They even refer to personal experiences on the subject: "They always called me 'butch', everyone made fun of me" (EM5).

When asked specifically, teachers affirm that homophobia has been identified in most schools: "Once I heard a teacher referring to a student as 'that *cabro fleto*' [Chilean insult]" (EM6); "Regarding homophobia, yes, I have heard many comments from teachers, but internally between teachers" (EM4). One of the teachers interviewed was discriminated against: "They made up that I had a relationship with a female colleague" (EM5).

Next, only when specifically questioned did teachers also identify discrimination in schools regarding ethnic or class background: "The girl who has blond hair is always taken to be in the front line for school events, to read in public and so on, and the boy who is darker, well, he is left behind. You can even tell who the Principal's favourites are" (EM6); "There are students who are ashamed of having Mapuche ancestry, some older colleagues asked them with disdain 'Who are you?' or 'What do you think you are going to achieve?'" (EM5). Regarding the stigmatization of functional diversity and adultcentrism, in one school the teacher said that there is strong stigmatization towards students with special educational needs (EM3). Regarding discrimination by age, a teacher affirms that younger students are underappreciated: "They are not yet aware of relationships and they are there, like in 'limbo', they just

started knowing what the world is" (EM6), which clearly reflects an adultcentric approach towards childhood.

Regarding training and gender and feminist activism, only one of the six SMGs interviewed had been trained in gender and feminism beyond the training modules carried out as part of the program. This teacher has shown interest for a long time, taking courses at the National Service for Women and Gender Equity, participating in women's networks and being an activist in the Chilean feminist movement (EM5). Although five out of six did not have a training or activist background, since they have done the program training, they have developed an increasing interest in gender issues, have begun to participate in marches, and have brought the issue of gender equality into their lives and interpersonal relationships (EM2; EM4; EM6).

Our results confirm that training improves teacher's subjectivities on gender (Agud et al., 2020). However, as discussed below, the theoretical robustness of the program and the teachers' training or "gender blindness" do not appear to be central in achieving community transformations (Ollis, 2017).

3.3. Effects: Perceived transformations by/in the community

Finally, we looked at what transformation the program had produced, according to the perceptions of the interviewees. Transformations have been noticed in different dimensions:

a) Transformations in students' behaviours

Teachers pointed out that thanks to the program, students can now talk about their bodies without shame, and men were better able to express their emotions (EM2). Furthermore, women are more empowered (EM4). They affirmed that respect among students had increased, fights had decreased, and teachers noticed that students could identify gender violence and report it. This first noted change echoes Ollis (2014) regarding the implementation of a similar program in which the author identified how students began giving value to the importance of developing empathy, understanding, awareness and self-reflection.

In addition, students have gradually normalized the issue of gender-sexuality diversities: "They know that the school is going to have mixed bathrooms, that there may be transgender boys or girls; the students already know these things, they already accept them, it does not have that rejection as immediate [which they had before]" (EM6). A comprehensive support for transgender students has begun, which was not the case before. They have created networks with social institutions and health centres, and allow the legal change of their names.

It has also been noticed that teenage pregnancy rates have decreased in secondary school (EM5). Teachers said that it cannot be known for sure whether the decrease in pregnancies is only due to the implementation of the program, but the rates have decreased during the time of its implementation, and the community believes it is directly related.

Finally, the program influences behaviours of students when they progress to secondary education. As a secondary school teacher declared: "If it wasn't for the monitors for gender in primary school, we would have more work to do in secondary school. But now the students […] are trained on gender in primary school so when they arrive at secondary school, the boys arrive 'softer'" (EM5).

b) Transformations in school traditions

The program has had a positive impact on all the schools studied. Since it was implemented, there has been a greater awareness of gender injustices and "sexism has been decreasing" (EC). With the implementation of the program, the schools have changed their pedagogical approach to educating their communities.

Interviews showed that the most noticeable changes have occurred in the schools in rural areas, which appeared to be ideal due to the closeness of the relationship between schools and families, which place a high value on the school institution and because the schools' management teams and teaching staff have generally been open and receptive to embracing families' concerns about gender, affectivity and sexuality (EM2).

Finally, we identified what seem to be small changes but with great symbolic meaning in three of the schools analysed. One school has abolished a traditional celebration that took place in schools, called the 'Reigns', in which some schoolgirls were elected to be queens of the year. Following the program, this was seen as sexist. One of the schools has changed from teaching the subject of 'catholic religion' to teaching the subject of 'emotional education' (EM3). Finally, another important change is that in two of the six schools studied the SMGs have begun to be paid for the extra work spent on implementing the program (which initially was not paid).

c) Transformations in families

Data showed that families tended to have sexist views, which the interviewees attributed to religion, the rural context and low educational level, with very marked gender roles between fathers and mothers. But lately, it has been seen that mothers are more empowered and do not allow themselves to be trampled on by their husbands (EM6).

On the other hand, it has been seen that there is more involvement of families in education, and they are more open to receiving information and understanding sexual and gender diversity beyond the binary codes and heterosexuality (EM1). Mainly families valued the work that the school was doing: "When we hold meetings with the families, they thank teachers for approaching those topics and some mothers ask us about sexuality, such as 'how big is the clitoris?' I show them pictures of the clitoris and they really enjoy learning about it" (EC).

As Burns et al. (2019) show, the incorporation of families is key for the success of sexual education. For the Paillaco program, the family has been an

important work axis that could continue to be strengthened to improve the success of education on gender, affectivity and sexuality.

d) *Transformations in the community*

For many years the village of Paillaco was nicknamed "Cuchillaco" (playing with the word *cuchillo*, meaning 'knife', in reference to the high rate of criminality) and as lawless village. As mentioned above, there were high rates of crime, alcoholism and violence. In addition, there are high rates of unemployment, single mothers and violence against women.

These numbers have been declining drastically coinciding with the period since implementation of the program (Centro de Estudios y Análisis del Delito de Chile, 2021). Interviewees stated that there have been many improvements in life quality and in gender equity. Regarding this, the municipal coordinator of the program says:

> It really changed the face of Paillaco, in terms of infrastructure, in terms of cultural processes, that is, there is a change in political and cultural perspective that today makes it a super interesting community. In fact, many people in Valdivia [a much larger city nearby] look to Paillaco as an example of good public policies. (EC)

The radio podcast raises awareness about violence and gender inequalities, and educates about sexuality, with the participation of different professionals and social leaders. Every year dates such as Women's Day, the Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, and the Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women are celebrated in the city. In addition, the program plans and carries out marches with the entire population, to fight for gender equality. An interviewee commented:

> Now sexual diversity can be lived, activists groups have been formed. […] In fact, as we had a connection with Amnesty International, students from my course formed a group called *Equals in Paillaco*. We started a project called *Cinema and Diversity*, the girls had the desire and I supported them, we did the project, we applied for it and we won it. So we did film cycles for diversity in the community. (EM5)

It is a fact that the community perceives that changes have taken place since the implementation of the program, although the extent of this is extremely difficult to quantify. There have been significant transformations in all educational actors, who show awareness of and responsibility for educating on gender, affectivity and sexuality; as well as in the community of Paillaco, where gender violence has decreased and there is greater respect and appreciation of diversity. In common with Ollis (2017), our study shows that a key for real transformation are the participatory methodologies and involvement of the community as part of the educational initiative.

4. Conclusions

This paper brings together the experiences of those who are closely linked with the program of gender, affectivity and sexuality in Paillaco, which significantly is bringing about changes that are perceived as such by the community. We aimed to generate a situated knowledge that enters into dialogue with other stories and points of view that are strongly situated in a particular narrative (Haraway, 1988), and to contribute to social change with the use of feminist contributions and the commitment of members of the community (Biglia, 2007). The implications of the findings that we have discussed in the paper contribute to an understanding of the relevance of the implementation of an education with a comprehensive critical gender pedagogy that is aligned with the specific context and that genuinely involves the main community agents. Furthermore, it can serve as inspiration for the implementation of similar programs in other contexts.

We found that the program helped to develop sensitivity to injustice by demonstrating how gender biases affect and operate in education. It did so mainly by training the teachers, which is key for raising gender awareness (Burns et al., 2019). At the same time, reflection is needed to identify how gender biases can be present in any educational structure and action, and how they can contribute to reinforcing and perpetuating gender inequalities (Rifà, 2018).

Education in gender, affectivity and sexuality as delivered in Paillaco does not only aim to teach liberating content, but rather to exemplify liberating practices in the classroom, the school and the community. This involves being open to opinions, emotions and proposals from students or other silenced agents. In addition, it seems to be essential to make students the protagonists of their learning process, and to give them a voice, not only as a way of putting their personal experiences into play and positioning them as an active subject in history, but also as an ethical act of freedom, identity self-ascription and respect. By recognizing all the elements raised that are involved in the educational process of the program, relating to corporeality, subjectivity and emotionality and critical feminist pedagogy, they can be understood as embodied, affective, relational and subversive practices (hooks, 1994). All this accounts for a theoretical, practical, relevant and important model for working on these issues, which acts as an example and point of reference for other educational centres in Chile.

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